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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 007199

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN REACTION TO EVENTS IN IRAQ

REF: A. AMMAN 6173

[1](#)B. AMMAN 6968

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.5 (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Strong GOJ backing for the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) continues, but the GOJ has yet to comment publicly on the situation in Najaf or the new Iraqi Interim National Council (IINC). The Najaf situation draws significant negative attention here. End Summary.

NAJAF STIRS JORDANIAN EMOTIONS

[1](#)2. (C) The Najaf fighting is a leading topic of conversation among Jordanians (though still not as prominent a concern as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.) The U.S. is the prime target of Jordanians' criticism for the violence in Najaf, although many question Sadr's motivations for holding up in the Imam Ali mosque. Some PA contacts see him as an opportunist who is riding a wave of anti-U.S. sentiment for his own political gain. Voicing a view that we hear often from the Jordanian regime, one Interior Ministry official who covers human rights argues that, as much as Sunnis dislike Shia's, many Jordanians see Sadr as a courageous figure because he is standing up to U.S. forces.

[1](#)3. (C) However, there is nervousness about the potential fallout of a military response to Sadr. Palestinian political activist Jamal Rifai said the uprising in Najaf should be ended immediately or else more "Mogtada Al Sadrs" would challenge IIG authority. Dr. Ibrahim Badran, Director of the International Relations Department at Philadelphia University, told poloff that Iraqi forces need to be--out in front--where the Arab media could see them. He feared that resorting to military action against Sadr risked further mobilizing the Shi'a population and creating larger problems down the road, particularly if greater care was not taken to protect the civilian population and the holy sites in Najaf. The specter of an Iraq dominated by radical Shi'a is at the back of most Jordanians, concerns over the future of their eastern neighbor.

[1](#)4. (C) The Jordanian government has yet to comment on the situation in Najaf, but the local press has given the conflict prominent--and usually anti-U.S.-- coverage over the past week. One recent press report admiringly characterized Mogtada al-Sadr as a "phantom," inspiring Shi'a fighters in Najaf, while another portrayed Sadr's fighters as "impassioned" and "organized," legitimately resisting a "Christian crusade." A recent press commentary in Al Ghadd--a new, independent daily trying to win mass appeal--contrasted him favorably with Sistani and the other Shi'a leaders, who are accused of being opportunists -- those in bed with the CPA previously -- and cut off from the Shi'a street. Meanwhile, some debated the legitimacy of the "resistance." One Islamic advice columnist in al Ghadd advised a "troubled Iraqi reader" that while it was wrong for resistance fighters to kill fellow Iraqis because it could lead to civil war, the coalition forces were legitimate targets as occupiers.

IRAQI COUNCIL, ALLAWI GET MIXED REVIEWS

[1](#)5. (U) The GOJ has publicly expressed support for the new Iraqi Interim Government (IIG), particularly during Iraqi PM Allawi's July visit (ref A), but has yet to publicly comment on the new Iraqi Interim National Council (IINC). Meanwhile, press coverage and popular reaction to the Iraqi government, Prime Minister Allawi, and the IINC coverage has been less emotional, but decidedly mixed and tied to developments in Najaf. One op-ed said Allawi missed the "chance of a lifetime" to prove he was independent by declaring his opposition to the attack on Najaf and asking MNF forces to withdraw. One editorial praised the recently held Iraqi National Conference for representing an "Iraqi consensus" and called for support for new Iraqi political institutions. Another editorial questioned efforts of the conference, characterizing it as an empty democracy that did not include opposing views, Arab parties, and representatives of Shi'ite and Sunni trends.

[1](#)6. (C) On the IIG, many of our contacts outside the

government view PM Allawi as a CIA tool with no independence from the U.S., and see little difference between the status of Iraq before and after the June 28 handover. Some Jordanians take a more nuanced view. Palestinian reformist Oreib al-Rintawi, Director of the al-Quds Research Center, is optimistic about the situation in Iraq. He believes that Allawi was a good choice to lead the interim government for now, and it was the right decision to respond with force to Sadr's intransigence and unwillingness to disarm. He suggested that it is important now to make an example of the militants in part to discourage other like-minded insurgents from similar activity. Hamadeh Faraneh, a former MP and a leftist columnist close to the Palestinian authority, also expressed optimism that the new Iraqi government was on the right track, but he dismissed "paranoia" among some Jordanian quarters about a rising Shi'a and/or Iranian influence in Iraq.

IRAQIS IN JORDAN WORRY ABOUT NAJAF'S OUTCOME

17. (C) Our Iraqi contacts in Jordan--mostly secular businessmen from both the Sunni and Shi'a communities--voice support for Iraqi PM Allawi and said the Shi'a resistance in Najaf needed to be put down immediately. They have expressed fear, however, that if the Imam Ali Mosque or other holy places are destroyed in the process, there would be a wave of Shi'a reaction against/against Sadr -- for going in there in the first place -- as well as against the U.S. Many have characterized Sadr as an opportunist, who is "uneducated" and unqualified to be a real Shi'a leader. That said, former Iraqi Minister for Oil Issam Chalabi said PM Allawi should have done more to bring Sadr into the political process (ref B).

COMMENT

18. (C) Because opposition to the U.S. intervention in Iraq was so widespread here, any course the U.S. and its Iraqi partners take is criticized. A military solution to the Sadr insurgency will of course be highly unpopular here, especially if it provides gruesome TV footage. But appeasement of Sadr would leave many Jordanians quite uneasy as well. Even thoroughly secular Shi'a, like Allawi, evoke suspicion among Jordanians inside and outside government. If a conversation in Amman about Iraqi Shi'a lasts long enough, racist, anti-shi'a bigotry usually surfaces.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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HALE